

Sketch

Volume 10, Number 3

1944

Article 3

Behind the Chowline

Rosemary Hicks*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1944 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

Behind the Chowline

Rosemary Hicks

Abstract

WE LOADED your trays as you hurried by, a thousand men an hour, and we could see you, day by day, becoming soldiers. Uncertain you were at first, and unaware of things that now are second nature—shiny shoes and sleeves rolled down and coats buttoned—all the way...

Behind the Chowline

Rosemary Hicks

WE LOADED your trays as you hurried by, a thousand men an hour, and we could see you, day by day, becoming soldiers. Uncertain you were at first, and unaware of things that now are second nature—shiny shoes and sleeves rolled down and coats buttoned—all the way. Alert, trained men in orderly formations—heavy shouldered in your khaki blouses.

You've conquered your homesickness, you who cried yourselves to sleep those first dark nights in strange barracks, and you beef in happy discontent. About the food—the clank of G. I. toast on metal trays at 6:00 a.m., and *fish* again, and “seaweed.” But you all liked rolls. Even the officers smiled when they saw those red-topped jelly rolls. And so we never noticed when you snitched an extra one, beneath your trays. And raisin bread—“Two slices, please—no, make it three. What, no raisin?” Day after day, until we knew your faces and checked you as you passed.

But now it's traintime, and you are there, on the dusty cinders, under the yellow lights. The signal towers glow red, and the long train thunders into the block, interrupting arguments as to the merits of Chicago, Michigan and Utah. Suppressed excitement. Crisp voices of an M.P., “Where's your ticket, soldier?” The waiting lines shift toward the track. The train grinds to a stop, in the swirl of steam and smoke and cinder dust.

And you file aboard—Shorty with the bull frog voice that doesn't match his height. And Honey—you always called us “Honey,” as the sailors call each other Mac, and so we called you Honey, too, though of course you never knew it. And you with the smile. No one stopped to see what lay behind your smile—we never looked beyond those perfect teeth. Our favorite K.P. next, with the weird bass voice—singing “Stardust” in the kitchen.

You wouldn't kill that mouse we caught one morning, remember—you turned him loose outside instead. Then Slim—six foot four. They say you had to leave home because the big boys ran you off. Well, good luck. And then Dead Pan, cold blue eyes and poker face. You carried your arm in a sling for weeks, and both blue eyes were black. And you, and you, the Golddust twins—I thought I was seeing double the first night you came through the line. But then I suppose you enjoy confusing people. And the Rear Guard—last, of course—the football team and the boys who played in the marching band. Always, nearly late for evening chow, you rushed in, red-faced and winded, with a breath of cool air clinging around you. But I see you made your train on time.

You're all aboard now. The loaded cars rock gently as the train begins to roll again, and slides out into darkness, leaving the station in the dusty, yellow light.

You are gone—like the color-painted leaves that fall. . . Brown, ragged things in sodden heaps, inert before the wind.

Formation Flying

(Dedicated to "Skipper" who is flying somewhere up there)

Velda Brickler

Winging along in the wake of a ship

Dipping . . .

Soaring . . .

Gliding

Gleaming ghost-like in thick swirls of gray mist

Now silver . . .

Now distant . . .

Now clear

Plummeting down to the tip of a sleeve

First sighting . . .

Then slipping . . .

And firing

Banking in circles that narrow and cease

Sailing . . .

Settling . . .

Safe